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SUBJECT: GRENADA'S MEDIA STRUGGLES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Grenada, which endured the experience of media censorship during the "revolutionary" era from 1979-1983, continues to struggle with the concept of a free press. Grenada's media workers often choose to side with one political party or the other; it's easy and often rewarding. Those who try to remain unbiased say privately that they are afraid to criticize the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government because of increasing government criticism of local media workers. The statement by the Minister of Health in early 2009 that journalists who are critical of the government should be in jail and the May 29 detention of radio personality Allan Campbell as a threat to airport security because he urged Grenadians not to go to the May 30 airport re-naming ceremony, have exacerbated media jitters. The deliberate destruction in late June of the antenna of the radio station which carries Campbell's program is rumored to have been sanctioned by the government. End summary

¶2. (SBU) Three incidents in 2009 have led non-partisan journalists to back away from openly criticizing the government. In January, the Minister for Health on national television said that journalists or media workers who criticize the government belong in jail. When asked to apologize, he first claimed it was a joke and when that did not wash with the public he gave what seemed to be a half-hearted apology. The Minister, who has no background in the health care field, continued to lash out at his critics for several months, but has completely disappeared from public view.

¶3. (SBU) The second incident occurred on May 29 when controversial radio broadcaster and New National Party (NNP) supporter, Allan Campbell was arrested and questioned about a broadcast in which he urged Grenadians to avoid the May 30 re-naming ceremony at the airport. The GOG accused Campbell of possibly planning to plant a bomb or otherwise disrupt the event. Campbell's lawyer was able to secure his release after forty-five minutes of questioning. The third incident occurred in late June, when the antenna of the radio station that broadcasts Campbell's show was destroyed. Given the location of the antenna in the Grand Etang National Forest and the fact that the station does not broadcast full time, the destruction was not discovered immediately.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: During the New National Party (NNP) governments from 1995-2008, the government had a love-hate relationship with the media. Government officials sought out the media to trumpet its programs and successes but, as the years went by, the media increasingly soured on the government. One local editor made it his life's work to destroy Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, printing articles heavy on innuendo and with the occasional outright lie. Mitchell more than once took newspaper/media owners and journalists to court and based on strict local slander and libel laws, won cases requiring them to pay him substantial damages, though he has rarely been able to collect. When the PM announced elections for July 8, 2008, any pretence of balance or objectivity disappeared. A number of local media workers openly campaigned for opposition NDC

candidates, slanted coverage of campaign rallies, and joined party leaders onstage for the NDC victory celebrations. Unlike in previous cases when the NNP government detained or harassed a media worker, the politically far left Media Workers Association of Grenada (MWAG) has remained silent. One reporter expressed disappointment to the Charge d'Affaires that MWAG has said nothing about the detention but noted that the current MWAG president is an ardent National Democratic Congress supporter. He added that the arrest has kept Grenadian media workers who try to maintain a balanced approach to the political parties from speaking out in support of Campbell.

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